

A number of us have sent a letter asking the Republican Leader to reconsider his position and allow us to vote on our legislation legalizing reimportation before the Senate adjourns.

This problem isn't going to go away if we ignore it. It has gotten worse for the past decade, and it will keep getting worse until we act. Tomorrow, hundreds of seniors will gather outside the Capitol to make their voices heard on this issue. Those voices must also be heard inside the Capitol as well.

It is time we make the statement that the pocketbooks of Americans are more important than the profits of big drug companies. It is time the Senate got a chance to provide seniors real, meaningful relief from high drug costs.

I yield the floor.

#### RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

#### MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will be a period for the transaction of morning business for up to 30 minutes, with the first 15 minutes under the control of the Democratic leader or his designee, and the final 15 minutes under the control of the majority leader or his designee.

The Senator from Massachusetts.

#### WELCOMING PRIME MINISTER ALLAWI

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, if the Chair would let me know when 13 minutes have expired, I would appreciate it.

First, I want to join with others in expressing a welcome for the comments of Prime Minister Allawi which we just heard in the House Chamber in the joint meeting. His challenge in governing and stabilizing Iraq is enormous. I believe that challenge has been made far more difficult by the continuing mistakes and persistent miscalculations of the Bush administration. Our policies are failing. We need to correct our course in order to stay the course, guarantee success, and bring our troops home with dignity and honor.

#### HEALTH CARE

Mr. KENNEDY. Few if any issues are more important to American families than health care—and in few areas has this Administration failed more dismally. Its record is marked by inattention, incompetence, and outright deception. And because its record is so weak, its campaign strategy is based on false attacks on JOHN KERRY's plan.

The Administration's failures have been especially damaging for senior citizens and Medicare. Today's seniors

built our country. They stood by it through World War II and the Cold War, through good economic times and bad. Medicare is a commitment to stand by them, to guarantee the affordable health care they need in their retirement.

As George Bush said in his acceptance speech to the Republican convention on September 2, "we have a moral responsibility to honor America's seniors." He's right about that—but senior citizens know that on Medicare, George Bush may say the right words, but he constantly does the wrong things.

The Medicare crisis gets worse every day for our seniors. The Administration's Medicare bill was passed by Congress, but only after the Administration concealed its true cost—and broke the law in the process. Now they are at it again. As the Washington Post reported last Sunday, the Administration concealed internal estimates showing that the cost of the bill is even higher—\$42 billion higher—than they admitted in January.

Last week we learned that the Administration has suppressed estimates showing that Medicare cost sharing and premiums will eat up more than 40 percent of the total Social Security benefit of the typical 85 year old. Three weeks ago, the Bush Administration announced the highest premium increase in Medicare's entire history.

That's the Bush doubletalk in action. Pledge to honor our senior citizens on September 2, impose the highest Medicare premium increase in history on September 3, hide the truth about the erosion of Medicare on September 14, and suppress yet another estimate of the cost of the Medicare bill on September 19. And that's just in the last three weeks. If George Bush gets four more years, senior citizens will fare even worse.

The basic problem with George Bush on Medicare is that he puts the interests of drug companies and HMOs first and the needs of senior citizens last. The Medicare bill forces 15 million senior citizens to pay more for their prescription drugs than they do today. It causes 3 million retirees to lose their good retirement coverage. It forces 6 million of the poorest of the poor—the elderly and disabled under Medicaid—to pay more out of pocket for their prescription drugs. It requires 6 million senior citizens to pay more in premiums than they will get back in benefits. Its high deductibles, high premiums and huge coverage gaps leave large numbers of senior citizens unable to pay their drug bills.

The Administration's Medicare bill also prohibits safe drug imports from Canada, so that drug companies can continue to gouge Americans, while citizens of Canada are able to buy the same drugs at half the price. The bill prohibits Medicare from negotiating drug discounts so that senior citizens can get fairer prices. The bill gives drug companies \$139 billion in windfall profits. It gives HMO's \$46 billion in

unfair subsidies, instead of using those funds for a decent drug benefit or to keep premiums at affordable levels.

Every major company and every major health plan in America negotiates prices for drugs. The Veterans Administration does it to see that veterans pay fair prices for the drugs they take. But when it comes to using the negotiating power of Medicare, the Bush Medicare bill says, "Oh, no—not for senior citizens."

George Bush must think the CEOs of the drug companies need senior citizens' money more than senior citizens do. Senior citizens are living on fixed incomes—and his Medicare bill is a fix to give away millions to drug industry CEOs.

Not only does the Bush Medicare bill block imports of drugs at fair prices, the Bush Administration and the Republican Congress won't even allow a vote on bipartisan legislation to give senior citizens and all other Americans safe access to affordable imported drugs.

President Bush said in Muskegon, Michigan, two weeks ago that he opposed drug imports because he wants to make sure the drugs were safe. Our GOP Senate Majority Leader says he won't allow a vote on the issue in the Senate, because he wants to protect Americans from unsafe drugs.

The safe drug argument is a sham. Our bipartisan bill guarantees safety. The only drugs that can be imported are drugs approved by the FDA and manufactured in FDA approved plants. The fact is that George Bush and the Republican leadership won't allow a Senate debate because they're afraid to defend their position before the full Senate, afraid of the accountability that a Senate vote gives the American people. The real safety issue for George Bush is the safety of the profits of the big drug companies, not the safety of American patients.

According to another revelation in the very last paragraph of last Sunday's Washington Post article, of all the money that the Bush Medicare drug bill lavishes on HMOs, only about 5 percent goes for increased benefits to patients. The rest goes for HMO profits and excess costs.

This Administration has been touting all the wonderful extra benefits for senior citizens who give up their regular Medicare and join a Medicare HMO. That's no justification for the \$1,000 in overpayments that the Medicare trust fund gives to HMOs. If those extra benefits are needed, they should be available to every senior citizen—not just those who join an HMO. But it turns out that the vast majority of that overpayment—according to the Bush Administration's own estimate—doesn't benefit senior citizens at all. It benefits HMO profits.

For this President, when he says "honor senior citizens," he really means honor big drug companies and big HMOs.